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Religion and Loyalty

CONNECTED;

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BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF A DISCOURSE

PREACHED

IN ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, LEEDS,

ON THE GENERAL FAST DAY,

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[1794.]



1 TIM. Chap. ii. Verse 1, 2, 3.

I exhort therefore that first of all, Supplications, Prayers and Intercessions be made for all Men:

For Kings, and for all that are in Authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable Life in all Godliness and Honesty:

For this is good and acceptable in the Sight of God our Saviour.

THE obvious Meaning of the Text is, that we are exhorted to pray for the established Government of our Country on this Principle, that all Government, as such, hath a Tendency to promote the Security and Repose of Human Life. If then we are required to *pray* for the *Preservation* of established Authority, with what Consistency can it be affirmed that we are allowed to *act* for its Subversion?

It is somewhat unfortunate for the Assertors of the Right of Resistance in Subjects, that the Monarch now at the Head of the Roman World was Nero, whose outrageous Cruelties must either have justified Revolt, or cut off all Plea and Pretence for it in every other Instance—

But indeed every Passage in the New Testament which bears any Relation at all to the Duties of Governors and Subjects, speaks the Language of unreserved Submission. When Peter in a Phrenzy of misguided Zeal for his Master drew his Sword in his Defence, the Reply of Jesus was, “they that take the “Sword shall perish by the Sword.” Ever after this we find the Conduct of his Apostles under their Sufferings uniformly peaceable and submissive; and it is very remarkable that Peter himself, the only Disciple who is recorded to have had Recourse to Violence, hath, in his first Epistle, one of the most explicit and forcible Injunctions to unlimited Obedience which is to be found in the whole Sacred Volume.

I am not ignorant of the Glosses by which modern Divines have contrived to elude the Force of these

Precepts and Examples; yet, after all that I have heard or read upon the Subject, I must still have Leave to think the primitive Christians, those who had intimately conversed with the Apostles, the best Interpreters of their Meaning. They were authoritative Interpreters. In their hearing many Doubts must have been proposed and resolved, many Hints thrown out by those divine Men to elucidate the Obscurities of their Writings; yet in the Works of the Apostolic Fathers there is not a single Passage which can fairly be understood to limit or to palliate the Doctrine of Obedience to "The Powers that be." But the best Commentary on the Writings of the Apostles is the Conduct of their Followers. And here I must hold up a Picture before the Eyes of modern Christians of what Christianity was in its better and purer Days; a Picture which will either provoke them to Imitation, or put them to Shame,

By the End of the first Century the Disciples of Christ were already grown up into a Multitude formidable to the State: by the Close of the second they had spread into every Province, and mingled themselves

with every Department of the Roman Empire. They were in the Armies, at Court, on the Tribunals of Justice. Yet did this oppressed and injured Body of Men, though perfectly conscious of their own Strength, and avowing it, yield an uniform Obedience to every lawful Command; and when called to any Compliance which they deemed unlawful, instead of flying to Arms for Redress, calmly declared their Obligation to obey God rather than Man, and submitted to the Pains of Martyrdom.

Another Circumstance very observable in their Conduct was, their consistent Adherence to the Principle of Obedience, without Regard to the Character of the Person who required it.

They would serve without Scruple in the Prætorian Bands of Nero or of Commodus: they would refuse to throw a Grain of Incense upon an Altar at the Command of Trajan or Antoninus. And what, it may reasonably be asked, was the Ground of a Conduct so repugnant to every natural Principle of Man?

They

They regarded themselves as “Strangers and Pilgrims upon Earth.” The Politics of this World were to them of small Importance. They beheld with little Emotion the Conquest or the Revolt of Provinces, the Elevation or the * Dethroning of Monarchs, while they contemplated with Joy the Kingdom of God working its Way silently but rapidly against all the Interposition of Man. “This then was the Victory which overcame the World even their Faith. They desired a better Country, even an Heavenly. They looked for a City, which had Foundations, whose Maker and Builder was God. By this divine Principle, the World was crucified to them and they to the World. Being reviled they blessed, being persecuted they suffered it, being defamed they entreated.”

If it be farther asked to what particular Doctrines they were indebted for this astonishing Measure of passive

* It is not here to be understood that the Primitive Christians would not have lamented a Crime by which a Monarch was dethroned, or indeed any Event brought about in the World, by Sin; but that their Views of Heavenly Things were so clear and luminous, that all Earthly Things appeared comparatively trifling.

passive Fortitude, it may be replied, to the Doctrine of Salvation by Grace through Faith, the universal Corruption of human Nature, the atoning Blood of Christ, the sanctifying Influences of his Spirit, all contributing directly and powerfully to form an humble, mortified and heavenly Mind, indifferent to the World from a Conviction that it " lyeth in Wickedness."

There is unhappily but too good Reasons to contrast this Picture of the primitive Times with what some are pleased to call Christianity in our Days. " Denying the Lord that bought them," his Pre-existence, Incarnation and Godhead ; divesting the Gospel of every Thing on which the wounded Heart of sinful Man can repose for Comfort ; and teaching, in its Stead, a System of self righteous Morality which the Bible never knew ; exalting the Rights of private Judgment above the Scriptures ; scrutinizing those Mysteries which Angels desire to look into ; and striving to contract the unfathomable Counsels of the Almighty to the Scantling of their own narrow Understandings.

Mark

Mark now the Effects of religious Presumption upon the political Conduct of Men.* They who will not walk humbly with their God, are most eminent for Disaffection to their King ; they who have fabricated for themselves a new Gospel, are the loudest in their Clamours for a new Constitution. Having left little in Religion to exercise Humiliation and Faith, they have lost of Course all true Relish of Spiritual Things ; they have acquired unwarrantable Notions of the Importance of the present World ; hence it is that they are become impatient under fancied Wrongs, and unmindful of substantial Benefits ;§ that they call for Protection while they refuse Obedience. These are the Fruits of modern Faith : the first Christians prayed for their Persecutors ; these revile their Benefactors : the

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former

* The Author does not here mean to assert that every Individual who hath departed from the Truth of the Gospel, is actually become a bad Subject, but that the general Tendency of those Religious Opinions is to produce such a political Temper and Conduct as is here censured. Is not this Sentiment unhappily verified in our Age and Nation ?

§ The ordinary and equal Protection of Government is surely no small Benefit, yet like the common Blessing of the Air we breath, is apt to be overlooked, because it is perpetual.

former were meek and acquiescent under pure Tyranny ; the latter are striving to subvert the most equitable Government upon Earth.

Under these alarming Circumstances, and others to which I shall presently advert, we are assembled this Day to humble ourselves in the Presence of God, under a penitent Sense of our own Sinfulness, and that of the Nation to which we belong. Of the illustrious Examples recorded in the Old Testament, to prove the Efficacy of National Humiliation, I shall here say nothing. Your Bibles are open before you, and the Remainder of this Day cannot be better spent than in collecting and comparing them. But, as it hath been asked with all the Insolence of Godless Scoffers, what hath been the actual Effect of those former Seasons of Public Humiliation which most of us recollect, I will answer in one Word, Ten Years of unexampled, and, I am sorry to add, of abused Prosperity.

It is lamentable to reflect that the great Principle of Corruption, which pervades all human Things, is perpetually counteracting the Operation of those Blessings which

which the Prayers of pious Men have drawn down upon Mankind.

In a former Season of general Distress, when the wanton Defection of our Colonies, and an impolitic as well as unprincipled Confederacy of the neighbouring Powers had brought us to the very Brink of Ruin ; when upon every Principle of human Calculation, a People however powerful, must have lain for many Years exhausted and feeble under the Effects of such prodigious Exertions ; we began almost from the Moment of Peace, under the Guidance of an invisible Hand, to derive Strength from Weakness, and Increase from Diminution. And here the Corruption of Men began to poison God's Blessings in their very Source.—Fruitful Seasons, improving Manufactures, Influx of Wealth, Increase of Population, quickly led us to forget our heavenly Benefactor, and, “ when we had builded ourselves goodly Houses, “ when our Silver and our Gold was multiplied, and “ all that we had was multiplied ; then we cried, my “ Power, and the Might of mine Hand, hath gotten “ me this Wealth.” Next followed a Deluge of

Luxury and Irreligion in the middle Ranks of Society; Profligacy, and Insolence, and Impatience of Restraint broke out among the lower Orders: the feeble Efforts that were made to preserve or restore Subordination were borne down as by a Torrent, and for these Sins we are visited by a Spirit, which now walks through the Land like the Pestilence in Darkness, threatening to tear up all the Institutions of Society by the Roots, and to bring us back to the Equality of the original and savage Natives of the Island.

We have indeed been cast upon a most eventful and awful Period of Time. When the ancient Nations had filled up the Measure of their Iniquities, the Almighty was wont to execute his Vengeance by bringing upon them some mighty Conqueror, "the Staff in whose Hand was his Indignation," or to deluge their Country with Herds of nameless Barbarians:— But he hath now wrought "a new Thing under the Sun." He hath permitted one of the most ancient and illustrious Monarchies of Europe to fall in Pieces of its own Accord, from a mere Principle of internal Corruption: The whole Head was sick, and the

whole

whole Heart faint. They were, in the Language of the Prophet, “a sinful Nation, a People laden with Iniquity, a Seed of Evil-doers, Children that were Corrupters; they had forsaken the Lord; they had provoked the Holy One of Israel to Anger:” And he hath, as the most terrible of all Judgments, left them to themselves: A woeful Example of what it is for Men to “forsake the Fountain of living Waters, and to hew to themselves Cisterns that will hold no Water; the broken Cisterns of presumptuous Reason and false Philosophy.” They are now a Monument of Wrath; and what the Almighty, before his Vengeance is exhausted, hath yet in Store for them, whether, like the Jews in similar Circumstances, their Name is to be blotted out at once by Foreign Conquest, or they are to be left to perish by the gradual Operation of their own enormous Wickedness, it is not for us to conjecture: only thus much I think we are warranted from past Experience to conclude, that the Effects of Atheism, namely, Thirst of Blood, and total Want of good Faith, with a Preference of savage, above civilized Life, which already begins to be avowed among them, would in a single Century more

reduce one of the fairest Portions of the Earth to a Desert, and cut down more than Twenty Millions of People, now possessed of all the Arts and Accommodations of Life, to a few hostile Tribes of wandering Savages, as ignorant and brutal as Esquimaux.

These are Reflections which I should not have indulged on this Occasion, had they not tended to excite awful Apprehensions of the mysterious Wisdom of God in the Administration of the World. It now becomes us to look nearer Home, and, while we pray, as we are bound, "for Kings and all that are in Authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable Life, in all Godliness and Honesty," to reflect by what Conduct, on our Part, those Prayers may be rendered most available at the Throne of Grace.

It is not by the Retirement, the Tears, or the Abstinence of a single Day, that the Favour of God is to be recovered to a Nation, which had almost ceased to own him. His Hand is now heavy upon us, and it is his declared Intention that "when his Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World should learn Righteousness."

“ Righteousness.” Groaning under all the Miseries of a cruel though necessary War, alarmed by the Prospect of intestine Sedition, and awakened by many visible Symptoms that God is about to do some great Work in the Earth, will it be at all consistent with our present Feelings and Professions, that we should return to-morrow to those vain and giddy Amusements, which devour the Time, and engage the Attention of the higher Ranks, to a very sinful Degree? When the “ Lord repented of the Evil which he said he would “ do unto Nineveh that he did it not,” it was not merely or chiefly because “ Man and Beast were covered with Sackcloth, and cried mightily unto the “ Lord: it was because they turned every one “ from his Evil Way.” And from how many Evil Ways we have to turn, it would exceed all the Time allotted to the Exercises of this Day, but to enumerate. To say nothing of those in high Stations, those in the middle Ranks of Mankind, who do not live in Habits of gross Sin, have for the most Part to deplore in themselves, Love of the World and its Pleasures; religious Indifference under the Mask of nominal Religion; want of Principle with Respect to what are called

called the smaller Morals ; Insensibility to the Obligation of obeying human Institutions for Conscience Sake.—To these is to be added one Symptom peculiar to the present Age, a certain fearless Contempt of all Authority, Irreverence for all Superiors, and a vile Selfishness which seems to be eating every generous Sentiment out of the Hearts of Men. For the gradual Extinction of those warm Feelings which led our Forefathers as by a spontaneous Impulse “to love their “ Country and honour their King” we are indebted to the cold Conceits of metaphysical Speculators, who are at present employing themselves in reasoning all Attachment out of the World.

I have mentioned these as some of the evil Ways, with Respect to which Men may possibly deceive themselves. But, alas ! the great Mass of the Nation is sinful in Ways, and to a Degree, of which the Sinners themselves can have no Doubt.

And is it to be expected that God “ will turn and “ repent, and turn away from his fierce Anger that “ we perish not, while we continue in all Respects “ such

“ such a People as this ?” The Humiliation of the present Day ought to be no more than the Beginning of a Course of Reformation. It were but prudent for us, even in a worldly View, to abate somewhat of that Softness and Delicacy in our Habits of Life, which we have so much indulged of late, as we know not how soon we may have to endure Hardship enough. Reflect with what Aggravation a Siege for Instance, or a great popular Tumult falls upon the soft and luxurious, on “ the tender and delicate Woman which “ would not adventure to set the Sole of her Foot to “ the Ground for Delicacy and Tenderness.” Can we forbear reproaching ourselves with our own Selfishness, that while so many Thousands of our brave Countrymen are fighting for our Hearths and Altars, and enduring every Hardship incident to War, and to a War with Barbarians, we can sit at Home and refuse to forego the indolent Enjoyment of a single Gratification ? Let not this Reflection be eluded by recurring to the great National Contributions that have been made for our Armies. Benevolence is a popular, a self-pleasing, an easy Virtue. But what our Circumstances now require are the old self-denying Graces:

Mortification and Humility, and Indifference to a World which may never again be to us what it has been.

Nothing can be more alarmingly impressive than our present Situation. Modern Wars have usually been engaged in for some collateral Question of Policy : and when a Dispute betwixt Family and Family was adjusted ; when it was determined who should remain in Possession of some distant Province or some Frontier Town ; whether this River or that Mountain should be the Boundary of Kingdoms, the Sword was sheathed again, and the Affairs of the World returned to their usual Course.

But the Contest in which we are engaged has no Parallel in the History of Mankind : every Thing dear to us as Men or as Christians is at Issue: it is a War of Property against Pillage :—of Humanity against Barbarism :—of Order against Confusion :—of Religion against Atheism :—of Allegiance against Rebellion.

And when we take into the Account the avowed Designs of our Enemies at Home. Designs, so desperate

perate that unless it please God, in his Mercy, to blast them, we may live to see all Law and Order overturned, all the Institutions, which the Wealth, the Wisdom and the Piety of our Forefathers had been accumulating for our Happiness through the long Period of a thousand Years, swept away by Bands of Ruffians, and nothing left in their Place but one wide Waste of universal Ruin. Surely every Energy about us must be roused by the Apprehension.

But when we think of Interests still more domestic and dear to us ; that we may live to see our own Children, to whom we once hoped quietly to transmit that Property which the good Laws of the Land had secured to ourselves—that we may see *them* butchered by the Miscreants of Anarchy, or, what is yet worse, left to the “tender Mercies of the wicked” for Support, we must be sunk to the Condition of Brutes, if we do not both cry and strive for Pardon and Protection. “If we do not know in this our Day the “Things that belong unto our Peace, they may be “hid from our Eyes.” It will then be too late to pray “for Kings, and all that are in Authority, that “we

“ we may lead a quiet and peaceable Life, in all Godliness and Honesty.” Alas ! all Authority will then be at an End, and there will be no Peace, and no Honesty, and no Godliness.*

Perhaps, in Conclusion, it may be the Will of God to grant this Petition, yet at the Expence of civil Bloodshed : Should that be the Case, one cheering Ray breaks through the thick Gloom that surrounds us : Thanks be to his Providence, after all that the Emissaries of Sedition have been able to accomplish, there are Myriads of faithful Englishmen, who would make their own Breasts a Rampart about their Sovereign ; and Thanks be to his Grace, there are Multitudes of true Christians, that are now mourning for the Sins and Miseries of their Country, who, if lawfully called to “ resist unto Blood,” would “ go forth in the Cause of God, and of his Christ, to Victory or to Martyrdom.”

* Fingimus hæc, altum Satyrâ sumente Cothurnum
Scilicet ? Et finem egressi legemque priorum,
Grande Sophocleo carmen bacchamur hiatu—
Nos utinam vani : sed clamat **GALLIA**, feci.

JUV. SAT. VI.

Finis.



